

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF EFFECT FOR THE WALTON AREA PLAN

Glacier National Park  
Montana

U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

December 19, 2000

**Summary:** Glacier National Park proposes to construct a small parking lot for visitors with trucks and horse trailers, and provide an accessible stock ramp for visitors with mobility impairments in the Walton area, but located outside the Walton Historic District. Additionally, the park proposes to construct a kiosk to provide improved information and orientation for visitors, a comfort station, replace existing trailers with improved housing, and identify the visitor service zone based on the conceptual representation in the General Management Plan. Currently, there is no formalized parking for horse trailers and trucks which is causing roadside vegetation damage. In addition there is inadequate visitor orientation. The only comfort station is located in the picnic area and is difficult to find. The Park proposes to build a horse trail from the new parking lot to the trailhead.

To fully consider the issues of this proposal, a project team identified two alternatives to be considered.

*Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).*

*Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).*

The consequences of these actions on natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources including visitor use are analyzed. This environmental assessment will be available for public review for 30 days in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Written comments should be sent to the Superintendent, Attn: Walton EA, Glacier National Park, West Glacier Montana 59936, or to [glac\\_public\\_comments@nps.gov](mailto:glac_public_comments@nps.gov). At the conclusion of the comment period, the National Park Service will issue a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION	3
Background	3
Objectives	3
Need for the Project	5
Issues	6
Issues Eliminated from Detailed Study	8
ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION	10
Description of Alternatives	10
Alternative A-Proposed Action	10
Alternative B-No-Action	13
Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Study	15
Environmentally Preferred Alternative	15
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	16
Natural Resources	16
Cultural Resources	20
Socioeconomic Resources	21
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	23
Natural Resources	23
Cultural Resources	31
Socioeconomic Resources	32
LIST OF PREPARERS	35
LIST OF AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED	36
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Species List	
Appendix B: Assessment of Effect to Historic Properties	
Appendix C: Compliance Requirements	
Appendix D: Wild and Scenic River Act, Section 7 Evaluation	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT**

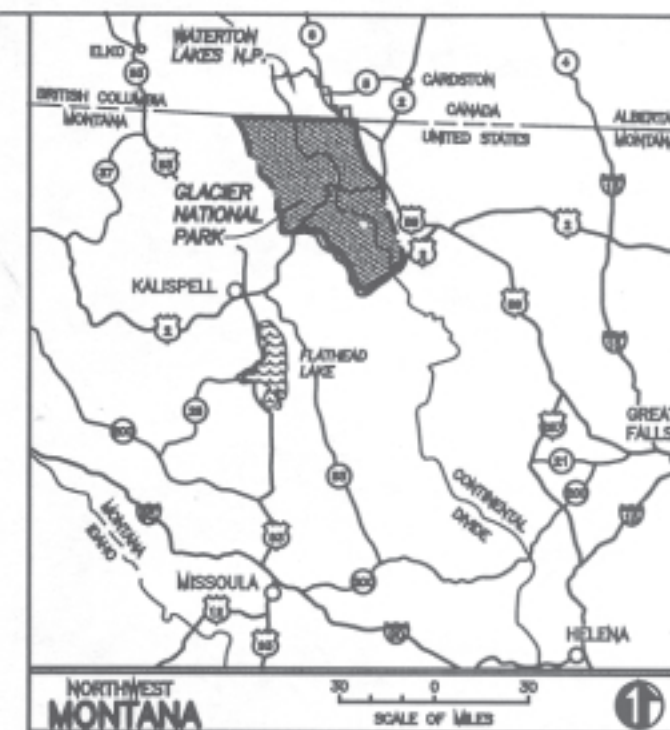
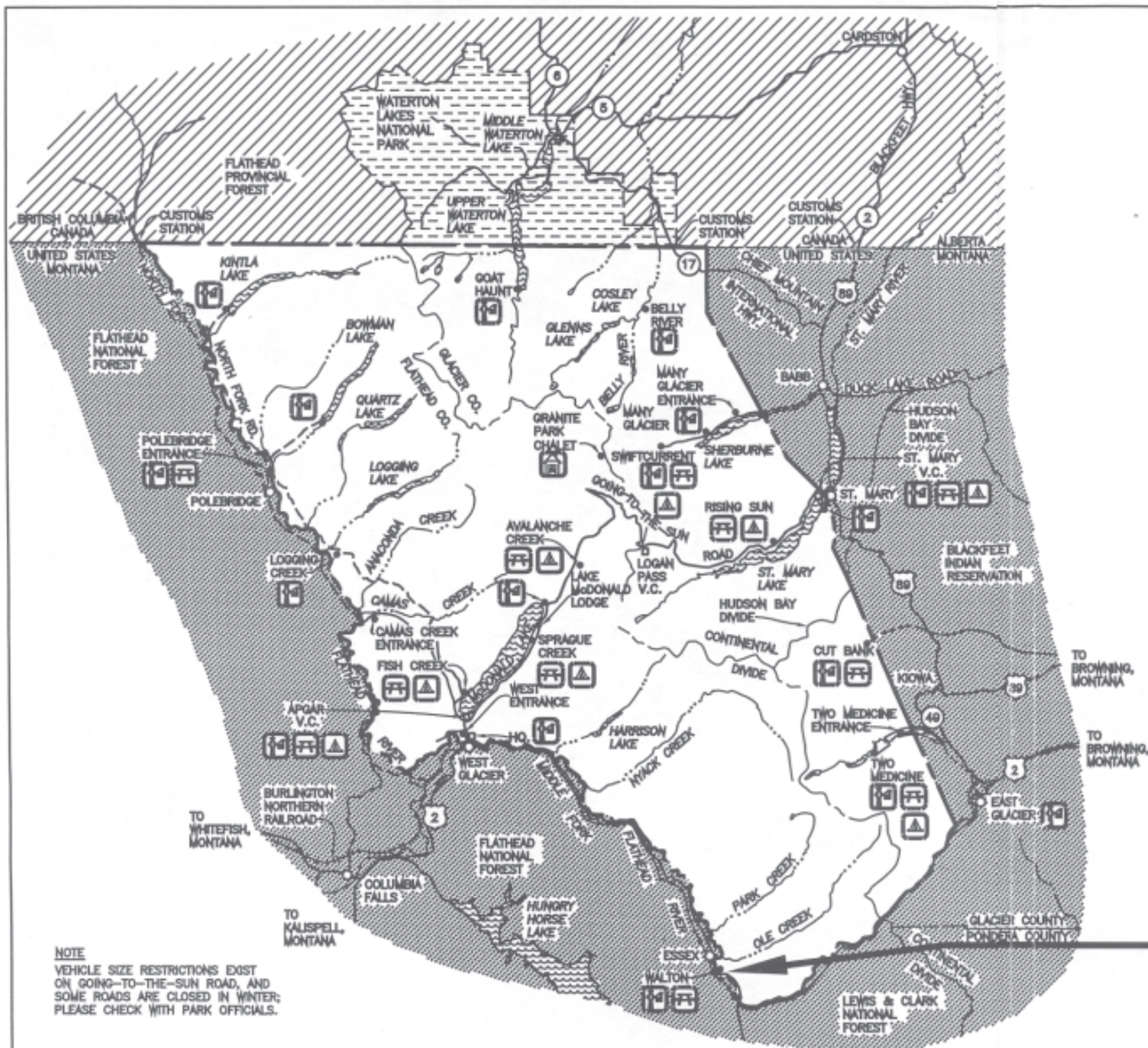
### **Background**

Glacier National Park, a portion of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, the world's first international peace park is also a International Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. It lies at the apex of three oceans in northwestern Montana and contains 1,013,5721.42 acres of breathtaking mountain scenery (Figure 1). The Walton developed area is located on the southern route around Glacier National Park on U.S. Highway 2, approximately 27 miles south of the park's west entrance at West Glacier, Montana. It is 1/2 mile south of Essex, Montana, and 2 miles north of the park's "Goat Lick" wildlife viewing area. The Walton area was originally developed in the early 1930s for administrative use and visitor access to the backcountry. It still provides access to the backcountry and picnicking. It became an historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

The purpose of this project is to address visitor concerns related to accessibility, orientation and information in the Walton area and to address substandard employee housing and to implement the General Management Plan (GMP) by formally designating the visitor service zone that was conceptually identified in the 1999 GMP. The proposed action for the Walton area described in this environmental assessment is to provide an accessible stock ramp for visitors who are physically challenged, formalize parking for trucks and horse trailers, provide a trail from the new parking area to tie into the Ole Creek Trail, and provide additional parking spaces for day and overnight backcountry hikers. The proposed action would also provide improved information and orientation for visitors to the area, a comfort station and improved housing for park employees.

### **Objectives of the Project**

- Improve accessibility for those visitors who are physically challenged.
- Provide better protection for vegetation resources in the Walton area.
- Provide formal parking for visitors with trailers and horse trucks.
- Provide improved visitor orientation and information to the area.
- Replace substandard employee housing.
- To provide an easily located comfort station for visitors.
- To identify the visitor service zone on the ground, based on the conceptual representation in the General Management Plan.




PROJECT LOCATION

# **GLACIER NATIONAL PARK** WORLD HERITAGE SITE



FIGURE 1

	UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GLACIER NATIONAL PARK		TITLE OF DRAWING CONSTRUCT PARKING LOT LOCATION WITHIN PARK WALTON RANGER STATION NAME OF PARK GLACIER NATIONAL PARK COUNTY FLATHEAD STATE MONTANA		DRAWING NO. 117
					PWD. NO. 1

## Need for the Project

Over the years, Walton has become a popular visitor access point for visitors who wish to ride their horses into the backcountry, (overnight or for the day) and for backcountry hikers. Currently, visitors with horse trailers drive into the Walton area to the barn (used by park staff for stock and storage of equipment for trail maintenance) and use an existing stock truck ramp to unload or load their horses. However, the majority of visitors unload their stock while parked along the road shoulder. This existing stock truck ramp is not accessible to visitors with special needs and is also used by park staff. There is very limited space for visitors to navigate their trucks and trailers. The road to the barn is the same road other visitors use to access the picnic area and parking for backcountry users, creating congestion in the area at times. After the stock are unloaded, the only parking available for this size of vehicle is along the road shoulder adjacent to U.S. Highway 2. There is only space for two truck/trailer vehicles. This situation creates an unsafe condition for visitors and their vehicles as well as damage to resources from compaction of the soil and trampling of vegetation.

Additionally, area orientation and information is poorly provided to visitors. The existing bulletin board is difficult to locate and offers limited opportunities to provide quality information to the visiting public. The developed area is also used administratively by the park. One employee is stationed there during the summer and lives in substandard trailer housing. In 1989, Glacier National Park was directed to remove and or replace all trailers with improved housing to comply with NPS housing standards. The only public restroom facilities are located in the picnic area and not easily found by visitors. Currently, there are only three spaces for day hikers and overnight users resulting in many of them parking in picnic area sites, displacing visitors coming to picnic.

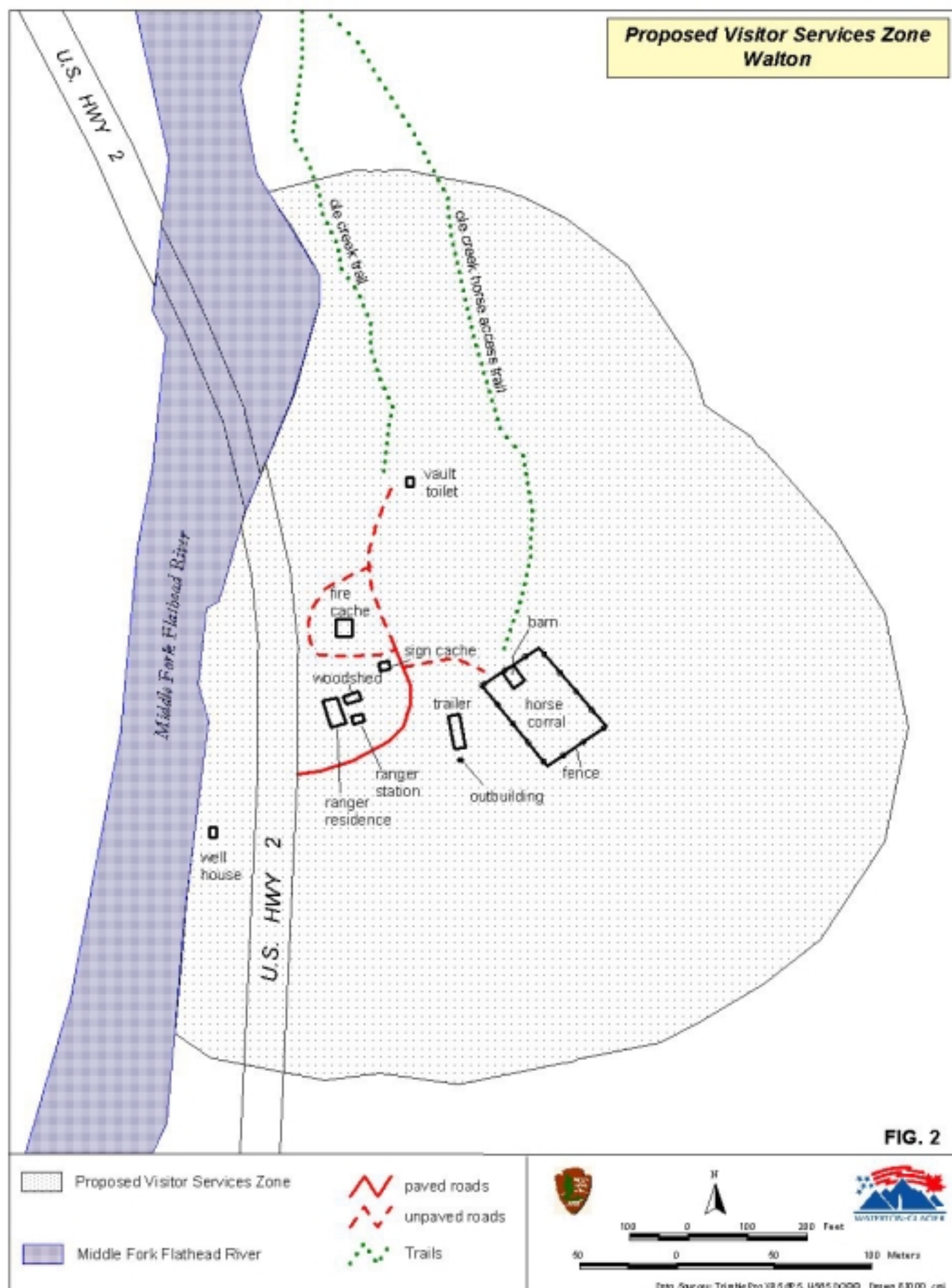
The site known as Walton is located in the “Middle Fork” geographic area of Glacier National Park. The Walton developed area was identified within the conceptual representation of the visitor service zone in the 1999 General Management Plan. According to the 1999 General Management Plan for Glacier National Park, the management philosophy for the Middle Fork is to “.... preserve its remote and wild character through a range of primitive visitor experiences. Visitor and administrative facilities would occur only along U.S. Highway 2.” The Middle Fork is divided into two management zones, a visitor service zone and a backcountry zone. According to the General Management Plan, the visitor service zone will be managed “to provide information and interpretive services. Development will include the highway, signs, trails, trailheads, waysides, sanitation facilities, parking lots, pullouts, picnic areas, exhibits and staging areas.” (GMP, 1999).

In the early 1990's, Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) engineers determined that the Essex Bridge across the Middle Fork of the Flathead River had serious structural cracks and would require replacement. The Essex Bridge is located outside the boundary of the park on U.S. Highway 2 and is owned by the State of Montana. Glacier National Park staff approached the MDOT about using an area within the park, adjacent to Highway 2 as a staging area for the bridge replacement. In exchange, MDOT would convert the staging area into a small parking lot for park visitors with horse trailers and trucks after the bridge was replaced. Use of a portion of the project area as a staging site is being considered and analyzed in this environmental assessment. MDOT released an EA on the Essex Bridge replacement to the public for comment in March 27, 2000. Also, through an interagency agreement, Glacier National Park has agreed to provide weed control and revegetation for the entire bridge project, including the areas outside Glacier National Park, in cooperation with the MDOT.

## **Issues**

The National Park Service, and other federal and state agencies identified issues and concerns affecting this project. These included cultural resource concerns, given that the area is part of an historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places; concerns about the affect on visual resources, vegetation, and the potential for the spread of exotic species by horse use, and the potential for increasing the number of hazard trees; wildlife use of the area and how these new though small developments would affect them; the lack of accessible stock ramps and facilities for visitors who are physically challenged. Impact topics were identified based on the issues and concerns and on federal laws, regulations, NPS *Management Policies* (1988); and NPS knowledge of resources in this area. This environmental assessment will assess the impacts of the proposal and the no-action alternative on the natural, cultural, and socioeconomic environment including visitor experience.

**Proposed Visitor Services Zone  
Walton**



## **Issues Eliminated from Detailed Study**

### ***Water***

No water bodies or tributaries are located within the project area. The Middle Fork of the Flathead River is located approximately 150 feet away, on the opposite side of Highway 2 from the project area. The small amount of disturbed area (.6 ac) and the distance to water would result in no affect to water. However, an Erosion Control Plan that incorporates Best Management Practices would be included in the project for areas of ground disturbance, to protect water resources.

### ***Aquatic Resources***

The project is not anticipated to impact any aquatic resources because of its small size and buffer between the Walton area and the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

### ***Prime and Unique Farmlands***

In August 1980, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) directed that federal agencies must assess the effects of their actions on farmland soils classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as prime or unique. Prime or unique farmland is defined as soil that particularly produces general crops such as common foods, forage, fiber, and oil seed; unique farmland produces specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts. According to NRCS, none of the soils in the project area are classified as prime and unique farmlands. There is no prime and unique farmlands as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service inside the park boundary. Therefore, the topic of prime and unique farmlands was dismissed as an impact topic in this document, and there would be no impacts on these lands (GMP, 1999).

### ***Environmental Justice***

Executive Order 12898, "General Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires all federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health, or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities. The proposed action would have no health or environmental effects on minorities or low-income populations or communities as defined in the Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Guidance (1998). Therefore, environmental justice was dismissed as an impact topic in this document.

### ***Floodplains***

The 100-year floodplain has not been mapped for this area. The 10-year floodplain has been mapped. The project area is not located within the 10-year floodplain. Records indicate that during the 1964 flood, this area was not affected. The 1964 flood was determined to be a 500-year flood. In accordance with the National Park Service Floodplain Management Guidelines to implement Executive Order 11988 “Floodplain Management” (E.O. 11988), and because the cost and time to map the 100-year floodplain over this area is prohibitive, the NPS will assume the project is within a regulatory floodplain. However, the majority of the proposed action is an excepted action from compliance with the E.O. (Sections V B.2a). The only action that cannot be excepted is the proposed housing. If the preferred alternative in its entirety is selected, the proposed housing would not be constructed until it is determined whether the site is outside the 100-year floodplain.

### ***Wetlands***

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory that was mapped for this area in 1992, there are no jurisdictional wetlands located within the project area. The National Wetland Inventory map was useful in determining the presence of wetlands adjacent to the project area. The ecologist for Glacier National Park followed up this information with a field inspection. It was determined that the project area did not contain wetlands.

## ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

### Description of Alternatives

This section describes the alternative actions, and summarizes the environmental consequences of the alternatives. Development of alternatives involved suggestions from the Project Team, park staff, and Backcountry Horseman. Two alternatives were identified for further evaluation as part of the Environmental Assessment, and are discussed below. The alternatives that were considered, but eliminated from detailed study, are also discussed and why they are no longer under consideration.

#### **Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).**

Under the proposed action, the visitor service zone would be defined on the ground using the global position system and entered into the Park Geographic Information System. A small parking lot would be constructed for trucks and horse trailers, including a stock ramp, kiosk, and a comfort station. In addition, the Park Service proposes to construct a trail from the parking lot to the trailhead, and to replace existing trailers used for housing with a permanent house for employees. The existing parking area for backcountry hikers would be enlarged to accommodate 2-3 more cars, providing a total of 5-6 parking spaces for backcountry users. The proposed action presents the National Park Service's preferred alternative (and is the proposed undertaking for Section 106 compliance). All actions described in the proposed action are consistent with the approved 1999 General Management Plan and protect, preserve, and enhance historic, cultural, and natural resources. The project would enable the Park Service to improve visitor facilities for stock use and to replace inadequate employee housing (Figure 3).

The Montana Department of Transportation would be allowed to use a portion of the old U.S. Highway 2 alignment inside the park boundary in the vicinity of the Walton developed area for a staging area for the Essex Bridge removal and replacement construction project. The new parking area would be constructed in the site used for the bridge construction staging area. The new parking lot would provide parking for 5 cars and 3 pull-through spaces for vehicles towing trailers. The parking area would be constructed in the previously disturbed corridor and old alignment of U.S. Highway 2 that was realigned to its present location in 1984. The parking area would be designed so visitors could drive in from the north or the south. Both entrances/exits would be paved, but the majority of the parking lot would be surfaced with gravel. Within the parking area, an accessible vault type toilet, visitor information/orientation kiosk, and accessible stock ramp for stock users who are physically challenged would be constructed. A hitch rail would also be provided.

The new parking lot and access would re-disturb approximately .6 acres of the old road corridor. Drainage would be designed and a National Pollution Discharge Elimination (NPDES) permit would be obtained. Erosion control measures would be designed and constructed to protect soils from erosion during the project in accordance with best management practices. Currently, the area directly west of the proposed visitor parking is




sparsely vegetated. Revegetation with native plant materials (shrubs and herbaceous plants) would be done. Some natural landscaping with native plant materials would also be done to screen the parking lot from the highway. Any disturbed areas that are not used for development would be revegetated with native plant materials, such as the roadside shoulders currently used for parking

A trail would be constructed from the new parking lot to the existing Ole Creek Trailhead that currently begins near the barn. Drainage bars would be constructed to protect soils and prevent erosion. The gravel parking area near the existing picnic area for backcountry users would be enlarged by 2-3 spaces. The parking area would remain a gravel surface. The existing stock ramp near the barn would remain the only stock (truck) load and unloading ramp for both NPS operations and the few stock users still utilizing horse trucks to transport horses. The bulletin board within the historic district would be removed and replaced with a kiosk located in the new parking area.

The existing mobile trailer unit that is located southwest of the horse barn and corral area and an existing pad that no longer has a trailer on it would be removed and replaced with a four bedroom dorm for park employees. The new structure would be designed to occupy the same location as the existing trailer and both pads. The new housing would be compatibly designed with the nearby historic structures.



**KEY:**

-  Historic District
-  Proposed Improvement
-  Ole Creek Trail (existing)

## Overall View of Proposed Improvements

Walton Ranger Station  
Glacier National Park  
National Park Service / March 2000



Not to Scale

**Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).**

The no-action alternative describes the conditions that would continue to exist at Walton if the proposal was not implemented. This alternative provides a baseline for evaluating the changes and related environmental impacts that would occur under the proposed action. Under this alternative, the Walton area would continue to serve as the main entry point into the Middle Fork geographic area of Glacier National Park (Figure 4).

Stock users would continue to use the existing stock (truck) ramp near the barn. Parking for trucks and horse trailers would continue to occur on the road shoulder. Visitors requiring services such as accessible restrooms and a stock ramp would not be accommodated at this location. Large trucks and stock trailers, passenger vehicles, and stock (horses) would continue to use the same narrow roads in the Walton area to access backcountry trails.

The only visitor restroom facilities in the area would continue to be located in the picnic area and would not be accessible. The existing substandard mobile trailer housing would remain until it no longer could serve as safe and adequate housing for employees. Once this was removed, no housing would be provided in this area.

The existing parking for backcountry hikers would continue to be used providing 3 spaces. When this filled, visitors would continue to locate parking on road shoulders or in the picnic area. There would be no additional costs associated with the no-action Alternative.



KEY:



Historic District

## Overall View of Existing Conditions

Walton Ranger Station  
Glacier National Park  
National Park Service / April 2000



Not to Scale

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Study**

One alternative was considered that involved simply redesigning the existing stock (truck) ramp over by the barn to be accessible to visitors with special needs. This alternative was rejected since it would not accommodate horse trailers and would require visitors to continue to use a congested roadway that does not allow room to navigate large vehicles. It would also continue the unsafe condition of mixing large horse vehicles, passenger cars, and pedestrians on a narrow, one-lane roadway.

Another alternative considered making the loop going through the existing picnic area large enough to accommodate horse trailers and larger vehicles for a turn-around. This was rejected because it would have resulted in more impact by having to cut many large trees.

Another alternative looked at placing the horse trailer parking closer to the existing entry to use more of the existing paved area. This was rejected because it would result in a very congested entry and exit for the Walton area.

A slight variation to the proposed action was considered that involved placing the accessible stock ramp closer to U.S. Highway 2. Although this would have resulted in slightly less vegetation being cleared, placing the stock ramp in such close proximity to U.S. Highway 2 was determined to be unsafe for stock and their owners during loading and unloading. Therefore, this variation was rejected.

## **Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). According to CEQ, the “environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101”. This is interpreted to mean the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best “protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources.” (Council on Environmental Quality, “Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ’s National Environmental Policy Act Regulations” 40CFR 1500-1508), Federal Register Vol. 46, No. 55, 18026-18038, March 23, 1981: Question 6a).

The environmentally preferred alternative is Alternative A. Removing existing horse trailer and truck parking from the edge of the road would provide greater protection of vegetation in the Walton area and eliminate compaction of soils. Compacted soils would be allowed to recover and vegetation would return to the roadside. The formal designation of the visitor service zone boundary would define limits of development, conceptually described in the General Management Plan for Glacier National Park.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **Natural Resources**

#### **Topography, Ground Water, Soils, and Geology**

The soil types in the project area are a complex of mixed alluvial forest soils, including rocky, sandy, and sandy over cobble alluvial forest soils. The soils are comprised of well-drained sandy and gravelly soils formed in alluvium from mixed rock sources. Some profiles have rock-free sandy surface layers. Rock types are predominantly quartzite and argillite (Dutton, Pettit, and Hadlock 1999).

The topography is nearly level. These soils have high productivity and revegetation potential, and are well suited to road and trail construction. However, they are highly susceptible to weed infestation and have moderate erosion potential. There is moderate potential for waste disposal, but water quality impacts are a concern, because of the high groundwater level (Dutton, Pettit, and Hadlock 1999).

#### **Vegetation**

The habitat type of the project area is spruce/queencup beadlily forest. Bunchberry is predominant in the understory rather than queencup bead lily, indicating the site is on the warm, dry end of the spectrum for this habitat type (Pfister et al. 1977). A list of species found on the site is included in Appendix A. No federally listed plant species are known to occur within Glacier National Park. No state listed rare species were detected in a survey of the project area. The north entrance way and the portion of the parking area proposed to be allocated to passenger vehicles is currently dominated by herbaceous exotic species, such as timothy and spotted knapweed.

The project area includes the old highway corridor that was abandoned in 1984. Revegetation measures were taken on the north and south ends of the old corridor, but no soil preparation was performed and the success rate of the planted species was poor. The old corridor is currently covered by herbaceous vegetation with many regenerating Engelmann spruce and black cottonwood trees. Adjacent to the existing road corridor, where the south entrance of the parking area is proposed, is mature trees of lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, western larch, and subalpine fir. A variety of shrubs and many forbs are present in the understory.

Along the east end of the project area where the accessible stock ramp and new trail are proposed, the soil is wetter than on the remainder of the site. Growing here are Engelmann spruce, black cottonwood, lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, and a thick understory of shrubs including pacific yew, Douglas maple, serviceberry, snowberry, red-osier dogwood, and Sitka mountain ash.

Paper birch, Douglas maple, thimbleberry, red-osier dogwood, snowberry, and fireweed dominate the vegetation on the site of the existing backcountry user parking and proposed 2-3-space expansion site. No mature trees are on this site.

The federally listed Water Howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) has not been found in the park; therefore, it would not be affected by this project.

### **Wildlife and Threatened or Endangered Species**

Mammal species known to occur in this area include elk, mule deer, moose, black bear, pine marten, coyote, porcupine, and Columbian ground squirrel among others. A few of the common birds include American kestrel, great-horned owl, American dipper, common raven, ruffed grouse, pileated woodpecker, varied thrush, gray jay, Stellar's jay, and golden eagle. Approximately 261 bird species and 63 mammal species have been observed in Glacier National Park. A number of those may occur in the project area.

Glacier National Park's federally protected wildlife species under the Endangered Species Act that have been known to occur in the project area are the endangered gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoccephalus*), threatened grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*), and threatened lynx (*Lynx canadensis*).

**Gray wolf.** The gray wolf has been known to occur in the Walton area in the past, but no recent activity of wolves has been recorded. Gray wolves are wide-ranging and their distribution is tied primarily to that of their principal prey (deer, elk, and moose). Key components of wolf habitat are: 1) a sufficient, year-round prey base of ungulates and alternate prey; 2) suitable and somewhat secluded denning and rendezvous sites; and 3) sufficient space with minimal exposure to humans (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1987). Wolves have been reported from all of the major drainages in the park, but their activity appears to be primarily in the northern portions of the park and are not known at this time to occur in the project area.

**Grizzly bear.** Grizzly bears are known to occur in the area at times, including some with habituation problems. Grizzly bears have home ranges of 130 to 1,300 square kilometers and use a mixture of forests, moist meadows, grasslands, and riparian habitats (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1995). Grizzly bears are distributed throughout the park. The grizzly bear population in the park is not known, but bear habitat is found throughout the park. Seasonal movement and habitat use are tied to the availability of different food sources. In the spring, bears feed on dead ungulates and herbaceous vegetation at lower elevations. During the summer, some bears move to higher elevations in search of berries, glacier lilies, roots, and in some cases army cutworm moths (National Park Service 1999). Avalanche chutes provide an important source of herbaceous forage for grizzly bears in the summer and fall (Rockwell 1995). Winter hibernation den sites are away from human disturbance, typically on steep slopes at high elevation.

Management actions focus on minimizing the potential for bear/human encounters. There are no known den sites in the area. Bear observation records indicate that most grizzly bear use through the visitor service zone occurs in May and June, with occasional sightings in July and August.

**Bald eagle.** No documented eyries or eagle roosts are known in the area, but bald eagle use of the area in summer and winter has been documented. Bald eagles are both year-round residents and seasonal visitors to the park. Resident and migrant eagles forage along the river during the winter. Bald eagles may forage for fish from tree perches or by flying along the river. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to delist the bald eagle due to recovery of the population. Even if the bald eagle is removed from the threatened and endangered species list, it would still be protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

**Lynx.** On April 24, 2000, the lynx was listed as a threatened species. Lynx habitat generally is described as climax boreal forest with a dense undercover of thickets and windfalls (DeStefano 1987). Advanced successional stages of forests and dense conifer stands often are preferred habitats of lynx for denning and foraging respectively. Large amounts of woody debris and minimal human disturbance are important features of denning sites (Brittall 1989). Lynx generally forage in young conifer forests especially where their primary prey, snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*), is abundant. Travel corridors are thought to be an important factor in lynx habitat because of their large home ranges, generally 15-21 square kilometers (Butts 1992). Travel cover includes contiguous vegetation cover over two meters tall (Brittall 1989). Lynx generally do not cross openings greater than 90 meters wide (Koehler 1990). Historically, lynx were common in the Middle Fork of the Flathead River corridor. Surveys have been conducted in the Park Creek/Ole Creek drainages. Desirable habitat was documented from these surveys, but no lynx were found.

There are no known federally listed threatened or endangered fish species, or state listed species in the project area. The Middle Fork of the Flathead River is approximately 150 feet from the project. The threatened bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) is a migratory species that is known to spawn in tributaries upstream and downstream from the project. The cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) is being evaluated for possible listing as a threatened species.

## **Air Quality**

Under the provisions of the Clean Air Act, Glacier National Park has been designated a Class I air quality area. Therefore, significant deterioration of air quality is unacceptable. The park currently monitors particulates, visibility, acid deposition, dry deposition, ozone, and fluorides. Monitoring occurs near West Glacier through the following national programs: National Dry Deposition Network; National Atmospheric Deposition Program; and National IMPROVE Program.

## Natural Soundscapes

The natural sounds of wind, water, and animals resonate throughout the park. Artificial noise in the park is generated from human activities such as traffic, motorboats, scenic air tours, and general maintenance and administrative activities. Elevated noise levels are most closely associated with visitor service zones near campgrounds, lodges, roads, and developed areas. Artificial noise levels in the vicinity of the project area are moderate due to traffic on U.S. Highway 2 according to NPS staff.

## Wild and Scenic River:

*The Flathead Wild and Scenic River is a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Public Law 94-486 (An Act to Amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act) was signed into law October 12, 1976. This law added the three forks of the Flathead River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Walton developed area lies within the boundaries of the Middle Fork Recreational River Segment, which is from Bear Creek to its confluence with the South Fork. The river forms the boundary of Glacier National Park from Walton to the confluence with the North Fork segment of the Flathead River. The US Forest Service has been designated as lead agency for river management activities in the Flathead River System, with the National Park Service supporting those efforts, and retaining responsibility for their lands within the river corridor (FNF, 1980).*

*Recreational River Areas are “those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past” (FNF, 1975). Recreational river classification emphasizes river values and recreational opportunities, including: free-flowing character, accessibility for public use, pleasing environment, unpolluted waters, and outstanding features such as scenery and wildlife (FNF, 1975).*

*The Middle Fork segment is characterized by ease of motorized access to a natural environment with outside influences present, but minimized, or where appropriate, mitigated. Sites are developed within the corridor, such as at Walton, to provide recreational use opportunities. Walton is characterized by a predominantly natural appearing environment with moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidence does harmonize with the natural environment. Interaction between users is low to moderate, but there is evidence of other users prevalent, such as from the highway 2 and railroad corridors. Conventional motorized use is provided for, consistent with construction standards and design facilities for the National Park Service. Administrative facilities are not obtrusive and fit harmoniously in the river corridor area. Recreational site developments within the corridor include trails, picnic ground, stock barn and corral, and administrative and visitor use facilities. Existing agency administrative structures, improvements, and recreation developments are necessary and would continue to be maintained with regard for river recreation and resource values. Recreational demands on the river and corridor are expected to continue to increase as more people become aware of the river as a nationally recognized resource (FNF, 1980).*

## **Cultural Resources**

### **Project Location**

- (a) Map: Essex Quadrangle, 7.5 minute
- (b) Legal Description: Section 14, Township 29N, Range 16W
- (c) Universal Transverse Mercator: Zone 12 306890Easting 5349710Northing

### **Archeological Resources**

No sites are recorded in this area in the park's Cultural Sites Index. The entire Walton Ranger Station developed area and area surrounding was intensively surface surveyed for archeological resources in 1994. No resources were found.

### **Historic Resources**

The Walton Ranger Station Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 and includes the ranger residence, barn, woodshed, garage, gas shed, ranger station, and oil house. The latter three, while inside the boundaries of the district, do not contribute to the district. Shown on the enclosed map, the district is bounded on the west by U.S. Highway 2 and on the south by the north edge of the entrance road. The district extends in a narrow corridor over the entrance road to include the barn, but excludes the stock-loading ramp near the barn. The district was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places by the following study:

"Multiple Resources Nomination for Glacier National Park", Historic Research Associates, Inc., Missoula, MT, under contract to National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver, CO; 1984.

The old roadbed to the east of the access road to the Walton Ranger Station is an original 1930 alignment of U.S. Highway 2. The road was realigned and this segment of road was abandoned in 1984 after a new bridge across the Middle Fork was built. The road has largely been obliterated with the pavement broken and removed. Any evidence of the old road prism such as ditching is faint to non-existent. Natural revegetation coupled with active National Park Service revegetation efforts have created a more natural setting. The vegetation in the roadbed has not attained the height of surrounding vegetation, so the course of the roadbed is still evident. The historic alignment at this location lacks the integrity necessary for it to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Ethnographic Resources**

An ethnographic overview study was conducted in 1993 and 1994 that involved consultation and research on the history and prehistory of the Kootenai, Salish, and Blackfeet people. Although this study has not been finalized yet and is in the final editing process, no ethnographic resources were identified for the Walton Ranger Station area. The Blackfeet and Salish-Kootenai tribes will be invited to comment on this proposal and consultation will occur with them in accordance with legislation, regulations and NPS policy concerning consultation with American Indian governments, communities, and groups.

## **Socioeconomic Resources**

### **Visitor Use and Experience**

According to 1999 visitor use data, 18,798 visitors came through the Walton Entrance in contrast with 14,759 visitors in 1988. The 1999 figures represent a 27% increase in visitation at that area. The Walton area provides picnic opportunities as well as backcountry hiking. There are 6 picnic sites with parking and a small 3 vehicle parking area for backcountry hikers. Many visitors who wish to ride horses in the park enter the backcountry at this location. This area also is popular during the winter for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. In 1998, fifty-seven parties registered at the Walton Ranger Station totaling 152 individuals. The most popular destinations from Walton were Ole Creek, Scalplock Lookout Trail, and Park Creek. Backcountry use from this location increased by 30% in 1998 (Glacier National Park State of the Backcountry Report 1998).

One stock (truck) ramp is available in the Walton area for visitors to use. It is not handicap accessible. NPS personnel also use this ramp to unload or load stock for backcountry trail maintenance. Parking for visitor stock trailers and trucks occurs on the road shoulder in the developed area, because there is no formalized parking available for these vehicles.

### **Land Use**

Glacier National Park totals 4,087 square kilometers of which approximately 1% is developed. Land use in the project area includes an historic district containing various structures described in the Cultural Resources section above, a 6 site picnic area, parking for three vehicles for backcountry users, a stock loading and unloading ramp, and a narrow, one lane .1 mile road through the developed area. It also contains one trailer used for housing and a cement pad that used to have a trailer on it. These facilities and structures are built within a forested environment. U.S. Highway 2 is adjacent to the project area. The most current figures available indicate that approximately 1,360 vehicles per day travel U.S. Highway 2 (1996 ADT, MDOT). According to the *Environmental Assessment on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River-SE Essex*, 1,790 vehicles per day are projected for 2010 and 2,660 vehicles per day are projected by the year 2030.

## **Regional and Local Use and Economy**

Tourism is an important part of the Montana economy. It has increased dramatically in the region during the last several years, according to park visitor use data, traffic counts on U.S. Highway 2, and accommodations tax revenue. The communities of Essex and Pinnacle are located along U.S. Highway 2 near the Walton area. These communities contain a small number of restaurants, stores, motels, a bed and breakfast, and the historic Izaak Walton Inn.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The effects of each alternative are assessed for direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on selected natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources. Impacts are described in terms of context (site specific, local, and/or regional effects), duration (short or long term), and intensity (negligible, minor, moderate, or major). The thresholds of change for the intensity of an impact are defined as follows:

Negligible – The impact is at the lowest levels of detection.

Minor – The impact is slight, but detectable.

Moderate – The impact is readily apparent.

Major – The impact is a severe adverse impact or of exceptional benefit.

Impacts to historic properties and to federally listed threatened and endangered species have been described in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act and the Endangered Species Act.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, which implement the National Environmental Policy Act, requires assessment of cumulative impacts in the decision-making process for federal projects. Cumulative impacts are defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions (40CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impacts are considered for both the no-action and proposed action alternative.

Following is a list of current and reasonably foreseeable future actions that could occur in the vicinity of Walton.

- Repair/rehab to historic facilities and structures within the historic district.
- Trail maintenance activities both in the developed area and in the backcountry of the Middle Fork geographic area.
- Crack and seal, and resurfacing of U.S. Highway 2 from Java to Summit.
- Replacement of the Essex Bridge over the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

## Natural Resources

### Topography, Ground Water, Soils, and Geology

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

The proposed project and use of the site as a staging area would compact soils in .6 acres of the project area. A drainage system in accordance with an NPDES permit would prevent erosion of soils on the site. The portion of the project area that is in the old road corridor was compacted previously when it was used as a highway. This roadbed still has a component of asphalt mixed in the soil surface. Therefore, impacts to the .6 acres of soil are expected to be minimal. Some fill would be necessary to level off the area in places, but changes in topography would be negligible, as slopes are currently less than 2%.

There would be no changes to superficial geology. Approximately 20 cubic yards of inspected and approved clean, sterile fill would be used to expand the 3-car parking area for backcountry users, but would have negligible effect on soils at the site. Staging and storage of material would not be permitted on native vegetation.

Erosion control and a drainage system would be constructed to prevent any adverse effects on soils. Revegetation of the road shoulders would stabilize topsoil and prevent erosion. There is the unlikely possibility ground water could be adversely affected by run-off and contaminants from the asphalt, but this risk is expected to be negligible due to the small amount of pavement and drainage system.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

The no-action alternative would have negligible impact on current soil conditions. There is some soil compaction occurring near the current road entryway where vehicles pull off to park, and this compaction would continue. The majority of the proposed project area would remain unchanged with respect to soils, ground water, topography, and geology.

***Conclusion:***

The proposed action would have minor direct effect to soil, and negligible effect on ground water, topography, and geology. There would be long-term positive, indirect benefit to soils by removing vehicles from the roadside to a parking lot.

***Cumulative Effects:***

Negligible cumulative effects to soil and aquatic resources would be expected from the Alternative A-Proposed Action because there are no additional projects planned in the Walton visitor service zone that would result in loss of soil, and in the surrounding area. There would be no cumulative effect from the Alternative B, No-Action. No known cumulative effects would occur.

**Vegetation**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposal).***

Use of the .6 acres as a construction-staging site would disturb and remove much of the second growth vegetation in the proposed parking areas. A portion of the area is weedy, exotic vegetation, and a portion is native, regenerating vegetation. The NPS would stake specific limits for staging activities and request that MDOT restrict activities to within these boundaries. The staging area would be kept within the perimeter of the proposed parking area, but may include the exotic, grassy buffer on the west side of the project area. The NPS would require that any gravel be inspected and be noxious weed free before being stored on NPS land. Gravel piles would be covered, as they would be susceptible to weed contamination due to the heavy weed source in the area. Off-road construction equipment would be steam cleaned before grading work is started.

There would be some long-term potential reduction of weed seed source from the weedy area near the current road entryway resulting in a beneficial affect. However, ground disturbed outside the perimeter of the paved or graveled area would be susceptible to weed invasion, since there is a weed seed source in the area. Revegetation efforts with native plants in the disturbed areas would attempt to compete with weed establishment, resulting in a long-term beneficial affect. Current disturbance of vegetation adjacent to the road corridor would be reduced. Herbicides would be used to control these populations, but would not significantly affect the environment. The park uses herbicides that are target specific and that have the least residual effect on the environment. Additionally, whenever weed populations are small, control actions can be effective in reducing spread. The park also removes small populations by pulling or other non-chemical methods.

Removing a small clump of trees, large Pacific yew shrubs, and a few mature trees adjacent to the parking site would adversely affect some regenerating Engelmann spruce and black cottonwood. However, the majority of the old road corridor would be left intact, allowing the regeneration to continue where it is thickest on the south end of the old corridor. Vegetation removal would be minor due to the small amount of vegetation proposed for removal.

A few mature trees adjacent to the parking lot may become weakened during construction, and eventually could become hazard trees in the future, resulting in an indirect adverse effect. They would then be removed or topped to mitigate the hazard, but would result in a minor reduction of vegetation on the site. Removal of dead or dying trees within the project area could temporarily reduce potential habitat for pileated woodpeckers and other species that are dependent on such trees. These species would be displaced to nearby habitat. This would be a negligible impact. Hazard tree identification and management would follow the park's hazard tree plan. Using large shrubs such as pacific yew, Douglas maple, and serviceberry to revegetate the site adjacent to the parking lot would reduce future conflict between trees, people, and property.

Accommodations for stock trailers provide parking that is currently along roadsides. Therefore, it is not expected that providing for parking in a parking lot would increase stock use into the backcountry. There are other factors that are more dominant in the visitor's decision to have a stock trip out of Walton, including trail condition and stock use regulations. Although it is documented that horses are carriers of weeds through their digestive tract, this project would have negligible effect on increases of weeds into the backcountry or displacement of native plants. Monitoring and removal of exotic vegetation along backcountry trails are included in the annual operational projects of the Exotic Vegetation Management Plan.

The proposal to replace the trailer and trailer pads with a four-bedroom dorm would not impact vegetation as the site is already disturbed.

The trail from the proposed parking lot, around the existing horse corral to the Ole Creek trail would be about 800 feet long. The exact location of the trail has not been identified yet, but it would be located within the visitor service zone, and within the area assessed for this project. It would impact approximately 800 feet of vegetation. Downed logs and some shrubs would need to be cut for the trail, but no trees would be removed. Vegetation would be removed in the immediate trail width and some branches may be trimmed. The width of the new trail disturbance may widen temporarily as people and horses trample outside the immediate trail corridor to avoid muddy conditions. The construction of a new trail route for stock to access the trailhead would prevent the use of stock on roadways within the Walton area, and thus reduce conflict with visitors in the picnic area.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

Most trees and shrubs in the area would remain intact. The old road corridor would continue regenerating toward a spruce forest until a fire or other disturbance interrupts the successional cycle. Disturbance and removal of vegetation along the road corridor would continue as vehicles try to park anywhere they can fit along the current corridor. The grassy area, currently adjacent to the entryway, presents a large area of weed seed source including several noxious weeds. The potential for these weeds to be moved up the trail into the backcountry would continue. The seed source may be slightly larger in this alternative, but the amount of traffic moving up the trail would be less, making the risk of weed movement somewhat lower in this alternative.

***Conclusion:***

The direct effect to vegetation from the proposed actions is minor when considering the small area of disturbance, and that the location of the parking lot and employee residence are within an area that has largely had prior disturbance to soil and vegetation. There is a long-term benefit to vegetation and soil by relocating roadside parking to an established parking lot. The new horse trail reduces potential conflict in visitor use activities.

***Cumulative Effects:***

The area has been previously impacted by its prior use as a road corridor and by current parking adjacent to the existing road entry and corridor. Under the proposed action, the successional cycle of the west-end of the recovering road corridor would be disrupted and permanently halted. Disturbance along the proposed trail and adjacent to the parking area would allow for increased weed infestation over time. Increased herbicide use in the area would not be an adverse affect because of the selective and low persistence of the chemicals used. Although, mature trees, within target range, of the parking area may be removed as they become structurally weakened over time; these evaluations and mitigation occur parkwide within developed areas, under the guidance of the Hazard Tree Management Plan. Under the no-action alternative, weeds adjacent to the entryway would opportunistically spread into any available new disturbance. No further cumulative effects are expected from this alternative.

## **Wildlife and Threatened or Endangered Species**

### ***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposal).***

The proposed action would result in a permanent loss of .6 acres of habitat for small mammals and birds in the vicinity of the proposed parking area. Similar habitat adjacent to the proposed work site is quite extensive and provides habitat for the displaced animals reducing the severity of this effect. Replacement of the existing trailer with improved housing would have no affect on wildlife species.

Removal of vegetation and widening of open space for the parking lot would have a minor direct effect on the habitat and movement of small mammals and birds, such as pine martin, porcupine, great horned owl, ruffed grouse, and varied thrush among others. Noise of construction and staging activities could temporarily disrupt normal activities and travel patterns of some animal species. Most of these animal populations are relatively resilient, and construction would have a negligible or minor effect.

The proposed project would have no effect on the threatened grizzly bear, bald eagle, lynx, bull trout, the endangered wolf, or the cutthroat trout. Since there is little known current activity of bald eagles or wolves in the area, the proposed action would have no effect on these species. Any lynx that may occur in the area would avoid open areas, as would their snowshoe hare prey. There would be no effect on grizzly bear because Walton is an already developed area and the proposal is located adjacent to an already highly traveled highway. The parking lot is not expected to increase use of the Walton area, or increase the likelihood of bear-human encounters. Placing the information kiosk in a more visible location in the parking lot would provide educational information on wildlife, and state the importance of not allowing bears access to food, that would result in reducing adverse affects to wildlife from visitors in the area. There would be no effect on the bulltrout or cutthroat trout, because the area of disturbance is very small (.6 acres), and the project has an adequate buffer and distance from the Flathead River.

### ***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

The no-action alternative would present little change in existing habitat conditions of extant wildlife populations in the Walton area. Visitor use would continue at a similar level as currently occurs presenting similar risk levels of human/wildlife interactions. Bear-proof garbage containers policy would continue to remain in effect.

### ***Conclusion:***

The proposed action would have negligible effect on wildlife or wildlife habitat because it is of short duration and is a small area affected within the visitor service zone. It is also located within close proximity to other developments, and has a history of prior disturbance within the project area. The proposed action would have no effect on the threatened grizzly bear, lynx, and bald eagle, or the endangered gray wolf, because of the small scale of the project and the infrequent use of the area by the species.

***Cumulative Effects:***

The proposal combined with reconstruction of the Essex Bridge may cumulatively adversely affect wildlife temporarily due to the noise created by the two construction activities. This would not be significant because reconstruction would be of a relatively short duration.

**Air Quality**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposal).***

During construction and any staging activities, there could be a temporary increase of dust particulate in the air. There would be no long-term changes to air quality as a result of the proposed project.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

Air quality would remain in the same Class I condition both in the short term and in the long-term if no action were taken on the project.

***Conclusion:***

There would be negligible impact on air quality from the proposed action since the size of the project and amount of ground disturbance would be minimal and temporary.

***Cumulative Effects***

No long-term cumulative impacts to air quality would be expected from either the proposed action or no-action alternative. However, the bridge replacement would have a temporary affect on air quality, increasing dust particulate.

**Natural Soundscapes**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposal).***

Minor temporary increases in noise levels would be associated with construction activities including use of the area as a staging site for the bridge reconstruction. Long-term changes in artificial noise levels may be slightly elevated due to potential increased use of the Walton area.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

No changes in natural or artificial noise levels would be anticipated under the no-action alternative. Being located adjacent to U.S. Highway 2, the Walton area has one of the higher artificial noise levels in the park. Replacement of the Essex Bridge would temporarily increase noise levels in the area.

***Conclusion:***

There would be negligible impact on natural soundscapes from the proposed action since the noise generated from construction would be temporary, and confined to a small area adjacent to a major highway.

***Cumulative Effects***

No long-term cumulative effects to ambient sound levels are anticipated from either the proposed action or no-action alternatives. Reconstruction of the nearby bridge may alter traffic speeds, which could affect noise levels.

**Energy Consumption**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

Use of construction equipment would result in a temporary increase in energy consumption during the period of construction.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).***

There would be no increase in energy levels as a result of no-action since no changes would be made.

***Conclusion:***

There would be negligible increase in energy consumption from the proposed action because of the small scope of the project.

***Cumulative Impacts.*** There would be no known cumulative impacts on energy consumption from the proposal or the no-action alternative.

**Visual Resources**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

The new parking lot would be visually screened by vegetation from the historic district and U.S. Highway 2, resulting in negligible impacts on visual resources. Removal of the trailer and replacement with a compatible house would have a beneficial effect on visual resources in the area. Revegetation of the road shoulder currently used for parking would have a beneficial affect on visual resources. Although the new parking lot would be compatibly designed for the area, it would be a new development that would change the immediate view of the Walton area along U.S. Highway 2. This would be a minor affect because the design is compatible with the area. Over time it would age and blend in.

The new trail between the parking area and the existing Ole Creek trail would not be visible except for the trailhead at the parking area and would not be an adverse effect on visual resources.

Enlargement of the backcountry parking site would not be visually intrusive as it would be screened by native vegetation and would not result in an adverse affect.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action):***

Leaving the existing mobile trailer would continue to adversely affect visual resources in the area. The historic scene would continue to be affected by the visual intrusion of vehicles, however, this would be temporary in nature.

***Conclusion:***

There would be minor visual impact on the visitor during construction activity for the proposed action, although the improvements would be screened by revegetation and blend in with the other facilities within the visitor service zone.

***Cumulative Effects:***

A new parking lot alongside U.S. Highway 2 and a new Essex Bridge may have a minor, temporary cumulative effect on visual resources by changing the existing views of this area as travelers come from the north and south. This is not expected to be significant, since the bridge involves reconstructing an existing bridge and the new parking area in Walton would be designed to blend in with the landscape.

**Wild and Scenic River:**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

*A Section 7 Evaluation was completed for the Walton Area Project within the Middle Fork Recreation Segment of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River System. This evaluation is included in Appendix D. The project is located within the Wild and Scenic Corridor, but the proposed actions are within the Walton Developed area, outside the 500 year floodplain, 150 feet from the river. Care would be taken to insure that actions under the proposal are compatible with river recreation and resource values, and are minimum developments needed to meet their purpose at Walton. The project would have no effect on Free Flow Status, appearance of the stream, fish habitat or water quality. The actions proposed in this project within the Walton Developed area would not have direct or adverse effects on the resource values for which the river was designated. There are no other known special or unique features within this section of the Middle Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River Corridor that would be adversely effected by the proposed actions in the Walton Area Plan. Please refer to the specific subsections of the Environmental Consequences portion of this environmental assessment for details on natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources. Refer to the "Issues Eliminated from Detailed Study" section for Water, Aquatic Resources, Floodplains and Wetlands.*

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton as they currently exist (No-Action).***

*No affect on natural and cultural values because there would not be any change to the area.*

***Conclusion:***

*The actions proposed would not lessen the values and qualities inherent with this segment of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River because of the small scale and short duration of the project.*

***Cumulative Effects:***

*The proposal combined with reconstruction of the Essex Bridge may result in temporary inconvenience to recreational river users. However, recreational use would be accommodated under the Montana Highway Dept. proposal for the Essex bridge reconstruction.*

**Cultural Resources**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

Construction of a new parking area adjacent to the historic district and highway would have no effect in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, on the Walton Ranger Station Historic District. The new parking area would be located outside the historic district, would be screened by native vegetation, and would not be visually intrusive on the district.

A new trail between the parking area and the existing Ole Creek Trail that begins at the existing stock ramp near the barn would be wholly outside the Walton Ranger Station Historic District. The trail would be not visible from most of the district and would not be visually intrusive. The new trail would have no effect on the district.

Enlargement of the existing backcountry parking site would be totally outside the Walton Ranger Station Historic District, would be largely screened by vegetation, and would not be intrusive. It would have no effect on the district, and would alleviate parking congestion within the district.

Existing housing outside the Walton Ranger Station Historic District consists of a very visible and intrusive trailer home, which is incompatible in appearance with the historic structures within the district. Although this trailer home is immediately outside the district boundaries, its replacement with a permanent structure that is compatibly designed would be an aesthetic improvement to the district. The trailer home is intrusively visible from much of the district, and its replacement would also be visible. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the replacement housing would have no effect on the historic district.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).***

This alternative would have no direct physical effect on the Walton Ranger Station Historic District. Parking congestion would continue at present levels, increasing as use increases over time.

***Conclusion:***

The proposed action would have no effect on cultural resources.

***Cumulative Effects:***

There would be no cumulative impacts on the historic district as a result of the proposed action or no-action because there would be no direct physical effect on historic resources.

## **Socioeconomic Resources**

### **Visitor Use and Experience**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

During construction of the new bridge and use of the old road cut as a staging area, visitors would be temporarily adversely affected by noise, construction equipment, and possibly some delays both on U.S. Highway 2, and entering and exiting the Walton area. Use of the Walton area may temporarily decrease during the reconstruction effort. The proposed action would have minor direct or indirect affects on visitors and visitor experience.

The improved information and orientation, easier and slightly expanded parking opportunities for hikers and horse users would beneficially affect visitors. Horse users with disabilities would be benefited by the new accessible stock ramp. A new trail between the parking area and Ole Creek Trailhead would benefit visitors by removing stock, hiker and vehicle use from the narrow roadway improving visitor safety and reducing congestion. Expanding the hiker parking and providing the new parking lot near U.S. Highway 2 would benefit those visitors who have come to Walton to use the picnic area and have discovered the sites being used for backcountry users parking rather than picnickers. Locating restrooms out closer to the highway would also benefit the needs of visitors, by making them easier to locate. Trailer replacement with a 4-bedroom dorm would benefit visitors and locals by continuing an NPS presence in the area.

Improvements at this area may result in increased visitation. This could be an indirect adverse effect on those visitors who come to Walton with the expectation of not seeing many visitors. Other visitors may find increased visitation at this site a positive, indirect affect because of the sense of safety in numbers in the backcountry. Although the new development would be designed to be compatible and blend in, there may be a slight change in character of the area near U.S. Highway 2. This may have minor affect on some visitors and improve the experience for others. Visitors would be beneficially affected by removing vehicles out of the historic scene.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).***

Visitors would continue to be adversely affected by not being able to locate the restrooms easily, backcountry users parking in the picnic area and displacing those coming to picnic,

and limited backcountry users parking. They would also be adversely affected by continuing use of the road by vehicles, horses, and hikers creating safety issues. Visitors with disabilities would continue to be adversely affected by the lack of an accessible stock ramp, and employees would continue to be adversely affected living in substandard housing.

***Conclusion:***

The proposed action would have a minor, temporary, direct effect on visitor use of the Walton area. Construction activities would be detected, but should not interfere with visitor use. The indirect effect of the proposed action would benefit the visitor by improving parking, stock operations, and access.

***Cumulative Effects:***

There would be no known cumulative impacts.

**Land Use**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

This alternative would result in a long-term change in land use from .6 acres of a regenerating road cut to a gravel and paved parking lot, restroom, and information/orientation kiosk adjacent to U.S. Highway 2. Approximately .6 acres of shrub vegetation would be eliminated by the 2-3 car parking expansion for backcountry users. Replacement of the substandard trailer and old trailer pad with a four-bedroom dorm would have negligible effect to the land use and would not result in an increase to the developed area. These actions would have a minor effect to use of the land, because most of these sites were previously disturbed and not fully re-vegetated. Revegetation of the road shoulder where truck/trailer vehicles are currently parking would restore the native vegetation and previous land use.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).***

This alternative would result in no additional change in land use.

***Conclusion:***

Although, the proposed action provides long-term effect on land use, the impact is largely confined to previously disturbed areas, and provides a benefit to the use of the Walton Visitor Service Zone, both for visitors and employees.

***Cumulative Effects:***

There would be no known cumulative impacts.

**Local and Regional Economy**

***Alternative A: Construct a new parking lot with facilities, delineate the visitor service zone, improve employee housing, and construct a trail (Proposed Action).***

The proposed action may result in a slight increase in visitor use of the Walton area, which may have an indirect, beneficial affect on businesses in the Essex and Pinnacle communities. There would be negligible effect on the regional economy from the proposed action.

***Alternative B: Continue operations at Walton, as they currently exist (No-Action).***

This alternative would not result in any adverse or beneficial impacts on the local and regional economy.

***Conclusion:***

The proposed action would have negligible effect on the local and regional economy.

***Cumulative Effects:***

A beneficial, cumulative impact would be a potential increase in the local economy for Essex and Pinnacle during the bridge reconstruction effort by the state of Montana from construction employees and any delayed visitors. There would be no other known cumulative impacts.

## LIST OF PREPARERS

### **Project Team:**

Fred Babb	Project Manager, Glacier National Park
Bruce Fladmark	Cultural Resource Specialist, Glacier National Park
Jack Gordon	Landscape Architect, Glacier National Park
Mark Pritchett	Landscape Architect, Denver Service Center, National Park Service
Mary Riddle	Team Captain, Natural Resource Specialist, Compliance Officer, Glacier National Park
Tara Williams	Ecologist, Glacier National Park
Dave Lange	Biologist, Glacier National Park

### **Management Team:**

Suzanne Lewis	Superintendent, Glacier National Park
Denis Davis	Assistant Superintendent, Glacier National Park
Larry Frederick	Chief of Interpretation, Glacier National Park
John Kilpatrick	Facility Manager, Glacier National Park
Steve Frye	Chief Ranger, Glacier National Park
Jack Potter	Assistant Chief Ranger, Glacier National Park
Gary Brandow	Chief of Administration, Glacier National Park

### **Contributors:**

Steve Gniadeck	Wildlife Biologist, Glacier National Park
Kyle Johnson	Park Ranger, Glacier National Park
Richard Menicke	Geographer, Glacier National Park
Chad Jacobson	Geographer, Glacier National Park
Bill Hayden	Interpretive Specialist, Glacier National Park
Lisa Jameson	Biologist, Glacier National Park
Joyce Lapp	Horticulturist, Glacier National Park

## **LIST OF AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED**

Backcountry Horseman of the Flathead; (Diane Johnson)  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena, MT.  
Montana Dept. of Transportation, Helena, MT  
Robert Peccia & Associates, Inc., Helena, Mt  
Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, Browning, MT  
Salish-Kootenai Confederated Council, MT  
Montana Environmental Info Center, Helena, MT  
Army Corps of Engineers, Helena, MT  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Kalispell, MT  
Environmental Protection Agency, Helena, MT  
Federal Highway Administration, Vancouver, WA  
Federal Highway Administration, Montana Division, Helena, MT  
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality, Helena, MT  
USDA Forest Service, Flathead National Forest, Kalispell, MT  
Flathead Regional Development Office, Helena, MT  
Flathead County Planning Board, Kalispell, MT

## APPENDIX A

PLANT SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<b>TREES</b>	
<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i>	Subalpine fir
<i>Betula papyrifera</i>	Paper birch
<i>Larix occidentalis</i>	Western larch
<i>Picea engelmannii</i>	Engelmann spruce
<i>Pinus contorta</i>	Lodgepole pine
<i>Populus trichocarpa</i>	Black cottonwood
<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Douglas fir
<b>SHRUBS</b>	
<i>Acer glabrum</i>	Douglas maple
<i>Alnus sinuata</i>	Sitka alder
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Serviceberry
<i>Betula occidentalis</i>	River birch
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i>	Red-osier dogwood
<i>Linnaea borealis</i>	Twinflower
<i>Lonicera sp.</i>	Honeysuckle
<i>Paxistima myrsinites</i>	Mountain lover
<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	Shrubby cinquefoil
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Chokecherry
<i>Ribes spp.</i>	Gooseberry
<i>Rubus parviflora</i>	Thimbleberry
<i>Rubus pubescens</i>	Dwarf red raspberry
<i>Salix scouleriana</i>	Scouler's willow
<i>Sambucus sp.</i>	Elderberry
<i>Sorbus sitchensis</i>	Sitka mountain ash
<i>Spirea betulifolia</i>	Shiny-leaved spirea
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Common snowberry
<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	Pacific yew
<b>FORBS</b>	
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Adenocaulon bicolor</i>	Pathfinder
<i>Anaphalis margaritacea</i>	Pearly everlasting
<i>Arnica spp.</i>	Arnica
<i>Aster conspicuus</i>	Showy aster
<i>Aster laevis</i>	Smooth aster
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	Lady-fern
<i>Clintonia uniflora</i>	Queencup beadlelily
<i>Cornus canadensis</i>	Bunchberry
<i>Dryas drummondii</i>	Yellow dryad
<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>	Fireweed

<i>Equisetum hymale</i>	Scouring rush
<i>Fragaria virginiana</i>	Blue-leaved strawberry
<i>Galium triflorum</i>	Fragrant bedstraw
<i>Geum triflorum</i>	Prairie smoke
<i>Heuchera cylindrica</i>	Rock alumroot
<i>Oxytropis</i> sp.	Crazyweed
<i>Penstemon albertinus</i>	Alberta beardtongue
<i>Penstemon confertus</i>	Yellow beardtongue
<i>Potentilla glandulosa</i>	Sticky cinquefoil
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken fern
<i>Senecio</i> spp.	Groundsel
<i>Smilicina stellata</i>	Starry Solomon's plume
<i>Solidago canadensis</i>	Canada goldenrod
<i>Thalictrum occidentale</i>	Western meadowrue
<i>Tiarella trifoliata</i>	Trefoil foamflower
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging nettle
<i>Veratrum viride</i>	False hellebore
* <i>Centaurea maculosa</i>	Spotted knapweed
* <i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>	Oxeye daisy
* <i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Canada thistle
* <i>Cynoglossum officinale</i>	Houndstounge
* <i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	St. John's wort
* <i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	Yellow sweetclover
* <i>Plantago major</i>	Common plantain
<b>GRASSES</b>	
<i>Bromus marginatus</i>	Mountain brome
<i>Calamagrostis canadensis</i>	Bluejoint reedgrass
<i>Elymus glaucus</i>	Blue wildrye
<i>Oryzopsis asperifolia</i>	Rough-leaf ricegrass
* <i>Agropyron smithii</i>	Western wheatgrass
* <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Redtop
* <i>Dactylus glomerata</i>	Orchard grass
* <i>Phleum pratense</i>	Timothy
* <i>Poa</i> spp.	Bluegrass

\*Exotic species.

<b>WILDLIFE SPECIES</b>	<b>SCIENTIFIC NAME</b>
<b>MAMMALS</b>	
black bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>
lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>
Columbian ground squirrel	<i>Spermophilus columbianus</i>
coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>
elk	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
gray wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>
grizzly bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>
moose	<i>Alces alces</i>
mule deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>
pine marten	<i>Martes americana</i>
porcupine	<i>Erethizon dorsatum</i>
snowshoe hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>
<b>BIRDS</b>	
American dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>
American kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucoccephalus</i>
common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
golden eagles	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
gray jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>
great-horned owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>
pileated woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>
ruffed grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>
Stellar's jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>
varied thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>
<b>FISH</b>	
bull trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>
westslope cutthroat trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi</i>

## **Appendix B: Assessment of Effect to Historic Properties**

## ASSESSMENT OF EFFECT FORM

### ASSESSMENT OF ACTIONS HAVING AN EFFECT ON CULTURAL RESOURCES

This form is required for all actions that have the potential to affect cultural properties.  
Attach continuation sheets as necessary

1. PARK: GLACIER NATIONAL PARK  
Include park subdistrict if applicable.
2. PROJECT TITLE: Walton Parking, Trail, and Housing  
PROJECT NUMBER: 1430-99-055 PACKAGE NUMBER:
- (a) PROJECT LOCATION: UTM's Zone 12 306890E 5349710N  
SMITHSONIAN NUMBER(S): 24FH397  
PROJECT TYPE: ☐ Planning ☐ Design ☒ Construction
3. PREPARED BY: Bruce Fladmark PHONE: 406 888 7943  
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Riddle PHONE: 406 888 7898
4. **IDENTIFICATION OF RESOURCES:** Has project area been surveyed for:

	Yes	No	N/A
Buildings	<u>X</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Structures	<u>X</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cultural landscapes <input type="checkbox"/>		<u>X</u>	
Ethnographic resources <u>X</u>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Archeological sites <u>X</u>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

If Yes: Results of survey

- ☐ No resources identified in project area  
☒ Identified properties already determined eligible or listed on the National Register of Historic Places (list)

Walton Ranger Station Historic District

- ☐ Identified properties for which a Determination of Eligibility is needed (list).  
Attach supporting documentation.

If No: N/A Is survey scheduled? Yes ☐ No ☐ Date

☐ not needed (provide justification, such as area previously disturbed)

5. **IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTATION:**

1) Level of Survey Work:   \_\_\_ Reconnaissance   \_\_\_ Sample  
                          X Intensive   \_\_\_ Tested       \_\_\_ Excavated

2) File search: X CSI           \_\_\_ State SHPO           \_\_\_ Other

3) Report(s) Reference(s) [Include Author(s), date and title]

"Multiple Resources Nomination for Glacier National Park", Historic Research Associates, Inc., Missoula, MT, under contract to National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver, CO; 1984.

Reeves, Brian, Ph.D.; "Glacier National Park Archaeological Inventory: 1995 Field Season Final Report, Part I."; National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region. 1997.

Montana Department of Transportation Road Log, 1960, MDOT, Helena, MT. Reference John Axline.

6.     Description of proposed undertaking(s). Include rationale for the undertaking. The current parking situation at the Walton Ranger Station is very congested and access is neither easy nor safe for towing units. The current mobile home housing employees is incompatible with nearby historic buildings and inadequate for employee needs at this site.

A new parking area would be constructed between Highway 2 and the Walton Historic District. The new parking lot would provide parking for 5 cars and 3 pull through spaces for vehicles towing trailers. The parking area would be constructed in the previously disturbed corridor, an old alignment of US Highway 2 which was realigned to its present location in 1964.

The parking area would be designed so visitors could drive in from the north or the south. The southern access would penetrate the existing tree line presently between the old corridor and the current highway alignment. The new parking lot and access would re-disturb approximately .6 acres of the old road corridor. Within the parking area an accessible toilet, visitor information/orientation kiosk and accessible stock ramp for physically challenged horseback riders would be constructed. A hitch rail would also be provided for riders to tie horses to once they unloaded from their trailers in the parking lot. The existing stock ramp near the barn would remain the only a stock (truck) unloading ramp for both NPS operations and the few stock users still utilizing horse trucks to transport horses.

Currently, the area directly west of proposed visitor parking is sparsely vegetated. Revegetation and some natural landscaping would be done to screen the parking lot from the highway.

A new trail would be constructed from the new parking lot to the existing Ole Creek Trail head that currently begins at the existing stock ramp near the barn. This would provide an alternative to horses riding along or down the existing road into the development and in front of park housing.

The gravel backcountry parking area near the existing picnic area would be enlarged by 2-3 spaces. The parking area would be surfaced with gravel.

Additionally, the existing mobile trailer unit that is located southwest of the horse barn and corral area and an existing pad that no longer has a trailer on it would be removed and replaced with a four bedroom dorm. The new structure would be designed to occupy the same location as the existing trailer and both pads.

7. Description of impacts of the undertaking on the resources identified in item 4.

Intensive archeological survey found no archeological resources in the area of potential effect.

The proposed work will all take place outside the Walton Ranger Station Historic District Boundaries and will have no effect on the district.

John Axline of the Montana Department of Transportation has checked that agencies Road Logs and finds that the alignment of roadway upon which the parking lot will be placed was constructed in 1952. The area has been revegetated, with little trace of pavement and many shrubs and trees growing in the roadway (see photograph).

Francis Auld of the Salish/Kootenai Tribal Preservation Office has walked the site in October, 1999 with Glacier National Park Cultural Resources Specialist Bruce Fladmark looking for ethnographic resources.

8. MITIGATION: N/A

1) Proposed mitigation and any special stipulations:

2) Is the mitigation work scheduled? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A X

If yes, scheduled with: Region \_\_\_ Archeological Center \_\_\_ Other

3) Will fabric or artifacts be accessioned into park collection?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A X

If yes, list objects to be curated.

9. The proposed action will (check as many as apply):
- 1) FABRIC:
- ☐ Destroy historic fabric.
  - ☐ Remove historic fabric.
  - ☐ Replace historic fabric in kind.
  - ☐ Add nonhistoric elements to a historic structure.
  - ☐ Remove nonhistoric elements from a historic structure.
- 2) HISTORIC SCENE:
- ☐ Alter historic terrain, groundcover, or vegetation
  - ☐ Introduce nonhistoric elements (visible, audible, or atmospheric) into a historic setting or environment
  - ☐ Reintroduce historic elements in historic setting or environment
  - ☐ Remove historic elements from a historic environment
  - ☐ Remove nonhistoric elements from a historic environment
- 3) ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES:
- ☐ Disturb, destroy, impair, or render inaccessible archeological (surface or subsurface) resources
  - ☒ Possibly disturb presently unidentified archeological resource or historic fabric **Note: An archeologist or para-archeologist will be present to monitor soil disturbance for the trail and backcountry parking lot construction.**
- 4) ETHNOGRAPHIC RESOURCES:
- ☐ Disturb, impair, alter or render inaccessible ethnographic resources
  - ☐ Introduce inappropriate elements (visible, audible, or atmospheric)
  - ☐ Possibly disturb presently unidentified ethnographic resources
- 5) OTHER:
- ☐ Incur gradual deterioration of historic fabric, terrain, or setting.
  - ☐ Involve a land transaction, sale, or lease.
  - ☐ Other (Describe briefly):
10. Documentation attached: **REQUIRED: (X) maps, (X) site plan(s),**  
(X) preliminary design or construction documents, ( ) photographs,  
( ) Scope-of-Work, ( ) Inventory forms, (X) National Register forms  
( ) Archeological Survey Map, ( ) Product samples,  
( ) Other: **Note: all site maps and inventory forms are contained in the Narrative portion of the EA or in Appendix B of the EA.**

11. PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT: N/A

A. Servicewide Programmatic Agreement August, 1995.

1) \_\_\_ Undertaking included in an approved plan under PA (name of planning document and pertinent page numbers.

2) \_\_\_ Undertaking meets requirements for programmatic exclusion under Stipulation C.1 or C.2. List appropriate exclusion(s).

B. Other Memorandum(a) of Agreement or Programmatic Agreements. Identify agreement, including specific exclusion(s):

PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT AMONG THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (GLACIER NATIONAL PARK), THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND THE MONTANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER FOR MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK; July, 1997. Stipulation V.B.3.

Note: While this project is “highly unlikely” to have an effect on historic properties as specified in the Programmatic Agreement and thus is programmatically excluded from full 106 review, Glacier National Park is inviting review and comments by the State Historic Preservation Office during the review of the Environmental Assessment of the project.

12. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT (If undertaking will have an adverse effect, identify organizations and groups that have been contacted).

Open public review and comment is invited as part of the Environmental Assessment process.

13. NATIVE AMERICAN CONSULTATION

\_\_\_ Not necessary \_\_\_ Necessary

If necessary identify organizations and individuals that have been contacted:

The Blackfeet Nation and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation will be provided copies of this Environmental Assessment and invited to comment or consult.

14. Recommended Determination of Effect.

X  No Effect \_\_\_ No Adverse Effect \_\_\_ Adverse Effect

OR  X  Programmatic Exclusion from further 106 review as shown in #11., above.

I certify that the work proposed meets the guidelines contained in NPS-28 and that the proposal incorporates all feasible measures to minimize adverse effects on cultural resources.

Superintendent

Date

Maps and National Register of Historic Places Nomination Forms are not available electronically. If you need copies, contact:

Dayna Hudson  
Glacier National Park  
West Glacier, MT 59936

406-888-7972

[glac\\_public\\_comments@nps.gov](mailto:glac_public_comments@nps.gov)

## **Appendix C: Compliance Requirements**

**The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (42 USC 4151 et. Seq.) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 701 et. Seq.)** The proposed action would be in compliance with these acts by providing an accessible comfort station and stock ramp for this project.

**The Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (16 USC 1531 et. Seq.).** This Environmental Assessment for the Walton area will be submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for review and comment. Additionally, a Biological Assessment will be prepared and submitted as well for their review and concurrence. The National Park Service has determined that the proposed action will not adversely effect federally listed threatened and endangered species..

**Executive Order 11593, “Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties” (36 CFR 60, 61, 63, 800; 44 FR 6068) and Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966** In accordance with these two laws, this environmental assessment will be submitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer of Montana for review and comment.

The Blackfeet and Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes will be invited to comment on this proposal and consultation will occur with them prior to issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact or a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

**Clean Water Act.** A sedimentation and erosion control plan would be submitted to the state of Montana, before construction and a permit authorizing the work would be obtained. The state of Montana would also issue stormwater management approval and a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit would be obtained based on the sedimentation and erosion control plan and construction drawings. Best Management Practices would be developed and adhered to during construction.

**Executive Order 11988, “Floodplain Management Guideline”** In accordance with NPS guidelines for implementing this executive order, a determination will be made as to whether the area proposed for the replacement housing is within the regulatory floodplain. If it is within the regulatory floodplain, an alternative location would be found for the housing and additional environmental analysis would be completed if necessary.

## **Appendix D: Wild and Scenic River Act, Section 7 Evaluation**

D30

October 31, 2000

Mr. Greg Warren  
United States Forest Service  
Flathead National Forest  
1935 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East  
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Dear Mr. Warren:

Enclosed is a copy of the Environmental Assessment and Assessment of Effect for the Walton Area Plan. Reference is also made to the Section 7 evaluation required for Wild and Scenic River Corridors. We appreciate the call from Fred Flint reminding us of the need for this evaluation.

The proposed project area is located within the Wild and Scenic River corridor of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Attached is the documentation required for your evaluation of the proposed actions within the Walton area and their effects on the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Your response and attention to this matter is greatly appreciated. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Mary Riddle, Compliance Officer, 406-888-7898.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Lewis  
Superintendent

Enclosures:  
Section 7 Evaluation  
Environmental Assessment

## SECTION 7 EVALUATION FOR THE WALTON AREA PROJECT

### **1. Established Need:**

Over the years, Walton has become a popular visitor access point for visitors who wish to ride their horses into the backcountry and for backcountry hikers. The majority of visitors unload their stock while parked along the road shoulder. The existing stock truck ramp by the Park Service Barn is not accessible to visitors with special need and is also used by park staff. There is very limited space for visitors to navigate trucks and trailers. The road to the barn is the same road other visitors use to access the picnic area and parking for backcountry users, creating congestion in the area at times. After the stock are unloaded, the only parking available for this size of vehicle is along the road shoulder adjacent to U.S. Highway 2. There is only space for two truck/trailer vehicles. This situation creates an unsafe condition for visitors and their vehicles as well as damage to resources from compaction of soil and trampling vegetation.

Area orientation and information is poorly provided to visitors. The existing bulletin board is difficult to locate and offers limited opportunities to provide quality information to the visiting public. The developed area is also used administratively by the park. One employee is stationed there during the summer and lives in substandard trailer housing. In 1989, Glacier National Park was directed to remove and or replace all trailers with improved housing to comply with NPS housing standards. The only public restroom facilities are located in the picnic area and not easily found by visitors. Currently, there are only three spaces for day hikers and overnight users resulting in many of them parking in picnic area sites, displacing visitors coming to picnic.

### **2. Proposed Activity:**

The Walton developed area is located on the southern route around Glacier National Park on U.S. Highway 2, approximately 27 miles south of the park's west entrance at West Glacier, Montana. It is ½ mile south of Essex, Montana, and 2 miles north of the park's "Goat Lick" wildlife viewing area. The Walton area was originally developed in the early 1930 for administrative use and visitor access to the backcountry. It still provides access to the backcountry and picnicking. It became a historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The Walton Developed Area occurs within the Wild and Scenic Corridor, with existing structures within 200' – 600' of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

The site known as Walton is located in the "Middle Fork" geographic area of Glacier National Park. The Walton developed area was identified within the conceptual representation of the visitor service zone in 1999 General Management Plan. According to the 1999 GMP, the management philosophy for the Middle Fork is to "...preserve its remote and wild character through a range of primitive visitor experiences. Visitor and administrative facilities would occur only along U.S. Highway 2." According to the GMP the visitor service zone will be managed to "provide information and interpretive services. Development will include the highway, signs, trails, trailheads, sanitation facilities, parking lots, pullouts, picnic areas, exhibits and staging areas."

The purpose of this project is to address visitor concerns related to accessibility, orientation and information in the Walton area and to address substandard employee housing and to implement the General Management Plan (GMP) by formally locating the visitor service zone that was conceptually identified in the 1999 GMP. The proposed action for the Walton area is to provide an accessible stock ramp for visitors who are physically challenged, formalize parking for trucks and horse trailers, provide a trail from the new parking area to tie into the Ole creek Trail, and provide additional parking spaces for day and overnight backcountry hikers. The proposed action would also provide improved information and orientation for visitors to the area, a comfort station and improved housing for employees.

### Objectives of the Project

- Improve accessibility for those visitors who are physically challenged.
- Provide better protection for vegetation resources in the Walton area.
- Provide formal parking for visitors with trailers and horse trucks.
- Provide improved visitor orientation and information to the area.
- Replace substandard employee housing.
- To provide an easily located comfort station for visitors.
- To identify the visitor service zone on the ground based on the conceptual representation in the General Management Plan.

In the early 1990's, Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) engineers determined that the Essex Bridge across the Middle Fork of the Flathead River had serious structural cracks and would require replacement. The Essex Bridge is located outside the boundary of the park on U.S. Highway 2 and is owned by the State of Montana. Use of a portion of the Walton Project area as a staging site for the bridge project is being considered and analyzed within the Environmental Assessment. MDOT released an EA on the Essex Bridge replacement to the public for comment in March 27, 2000. Also, through an interagency agreement, Glacier National Park has agreed to provide weed control and revegetation for the entire bridge project, including the areas outside Glacier National Park, in cooperation with the MDOT.

### **3. Affect on Within Channel Conditions:**

No water bodies or tributaries are located within the project area. The Middle Fork of the Flathead River is located approximately 150 feet away, on the opposite side of Highway 2 from the project area. The small amount of disturbed area (.6ac) and the distance to water would result in no affect to water. An Erosion Control Plan that incorporated Best Management Practices would be included to protect water resources. The project is not anticipated to impact any aquatic resources because of its small size and distance from the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

### **4. Affect on Floodplain/Wetland Conditions:**

The 100-year floodplain has not been mapped for this area. The 10-year floodplain has been mapped. The project area is not located within the 10-year floodplain. Records indicate that during the 1964 flood, this area was not affected. The 1964 flood was determined to be a 500-year flood. In accordance with the National Park Service Floodplain Management Guidelines to implement Executive Order 11988 “Floodplain Management” (E.O. 11988), and because the cost and time to map the 100-year floodplain over this area is prohibitive, the NPS will assume the project is within a regulatory floodplain. However, the majority of the proposed action is an excepted action from compliance with the E.O. (Sections V B.2a). The only action that cannot be excepted is the proposed housing. If the preferred alternative in its entirety were selected, the proposed housing would not be constructed until it is determined whether the site is outside the 100-year floodplain.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory that was mapped for this area in 1992, there are no jurisdictional wetlands located within the project area. The National Wetland Inventory map was useful in determining the presence of wetlands adjacent to the project area. The ecologist for Glacier National Park followed up this information with a field inspection. It was determined that the project area did not contain wetlands.

#### **5. Affect of Project on Upland Conditions:**

The improvements and use of the site as a staging area would compact .6 acres of soils in the project area. The proposed action would have minor direct effect to soil, and negligible effect on ground water, topography, and geology. There would be long-term positive, indirect benefit to soils by removing vehicles from the roadside to a parking lot. Negligible cumulative effects to soil and aquatic resources would be expected from the proposed action because there are no additional projects planned in the Walton visitor service zone that would result in loss of soil, and in the surrounding area.

The direct effect to vegetation from the proposed actions is minor when considering the small area of disturbance, and that the location of the parking lot and employee residence are within an area that has largely had prior disturbance to soil and vegetation. There is a long-term benefit to vegetation and soil by relocating roadside parking to an established parking lot. The new horse trail reduces potential conflict in visitor use activities. The area has been previously impacted by its prior use as a road corridor and by current parking adjacent to the existing road entry and corridor. Under the proposed action, the successional cycle of the west-end of the recovering road corridor would be disrupted and permanently halted. Disturbance along the proposed trail and adjacent to the parking area would allow for increased weed infestation over time. Increased herbicide use in the area would not be an adverse affect because of the selective and low persistence of the chemicals used. Although mature trees, within target range, of the parking area may be removed as they become structurally weakened over time; these evaluations and mitigation occur parkwide within developed areas, under the guidance of the Hazard Tree Management Plan.

The proposed action would have negligible effect on wildlife or wildlife habitat because it is of short duration and is a small area affected within the visitor service zone. It is also located within close proximity to other developments, and has a history of prior disturbance within the project area. The proposed action would have no effect on the threatened grizzly bear, lynx, bald eagle, or the endangered gray wolf, because of the small scale of the project and the infrequent use of the area by the species. There would be no effect on the bull trout or cutthroat trout, because the area of disturbance is very small and the project has an adequate buffer and distance from the Flathead River. The proposal combined with reconstruction of the Essex Bridge may cumulatively adversely affect wildlife temporarily due to the noise created by the two construction activities. This would not be significant because construction would be of a relatively short duration.

The proposed action would have no effect on cultural resources. There would be no cumulative impacts on the historic district as a result of the proposed action.

#### **6. Affect of Changes in On-Site Conditions on Existing Hydrologic or Biological Processes:**

The project will have no effect on the ability of the channel to change course or inundate its floodplain since the project is 150 feet away from the river and outside the 500 year floodplain. There will be no new effect on stream bank erosion potential; sediment routing or debris loading since the project is of small scope, and there are adequate buffers from the project area to the river. There would be no affect on amount or timing of flow in the channel, existing flow patterns, surface and subsurface flow characteristics, flood storage, aggradation/degradation of the channel. The project would have negligible effect on streamside vegetation, nutrient cycling, fish spawning, avian species, amphibians/mollusks, and other biological processes/relationships (please see above) since the actions proposed are 150 feet or more away from the river channel, and the improvements are located within the developed area that has experienced prior disturbance.

#### **7. Magnitude and Spatial Extent of Potential Off-Site Changes**

This project would have no effect or changes that would influence other parts of the river system. The proposed action would have a minor, temporary, direct effect on visitor use of the Walton area. Construction activities would be detected, but should not interfere with visitor use. The indirect effect of the proposed action would benefit the visitor by improving parking, stock operations, and access. Although the proposed action provides long-term effect on land use, the impact is largely confined to previously disturbed areas, and provides a benefit to the use of the Walton Visitor Service Zone, both for visitors and employees.

#### **8. Time Scale for the Project:**

Timing for this project is contingent on the MDOT completing its NEPA and design work to the Essex Bridge Project, and our ability to procure funding.

#### **9. Comparison of Project Analysis to Management Goals:**

Glacier National Park proposes to construct a small parking lot for visitors with trucks and horse trailers, and provides an accessible stock ramp for visitors with mobility impairments in the Walton Area. The park also proposes to construct a kiosk to provide improved information and orientation for visitors, a comfort station, replace existing trailers with improved housing, and identify the visitor service zone. The park also proposes to build a horse trail from the new parking lot to the trailhead. The Walton developed area predates the designation of the Wild and Scenic River corridor. There would be negligible effects on the Middle Fork and no change to existing flows, water quality, riparian areas, floodplain conditions or any outstanding, remarkable or other significant resource values.

## **10. Section 7 Determination:**

### *Free Flowing Status*

This project is located within the Wild and Scenic Corridor, but the proposed actions are within the Walton Developed area, outside the 500 year floodplain, 150 feet from the river. The project would have no effect on Free Flow Status.

### *Resource Values for Which the River Was Designated*

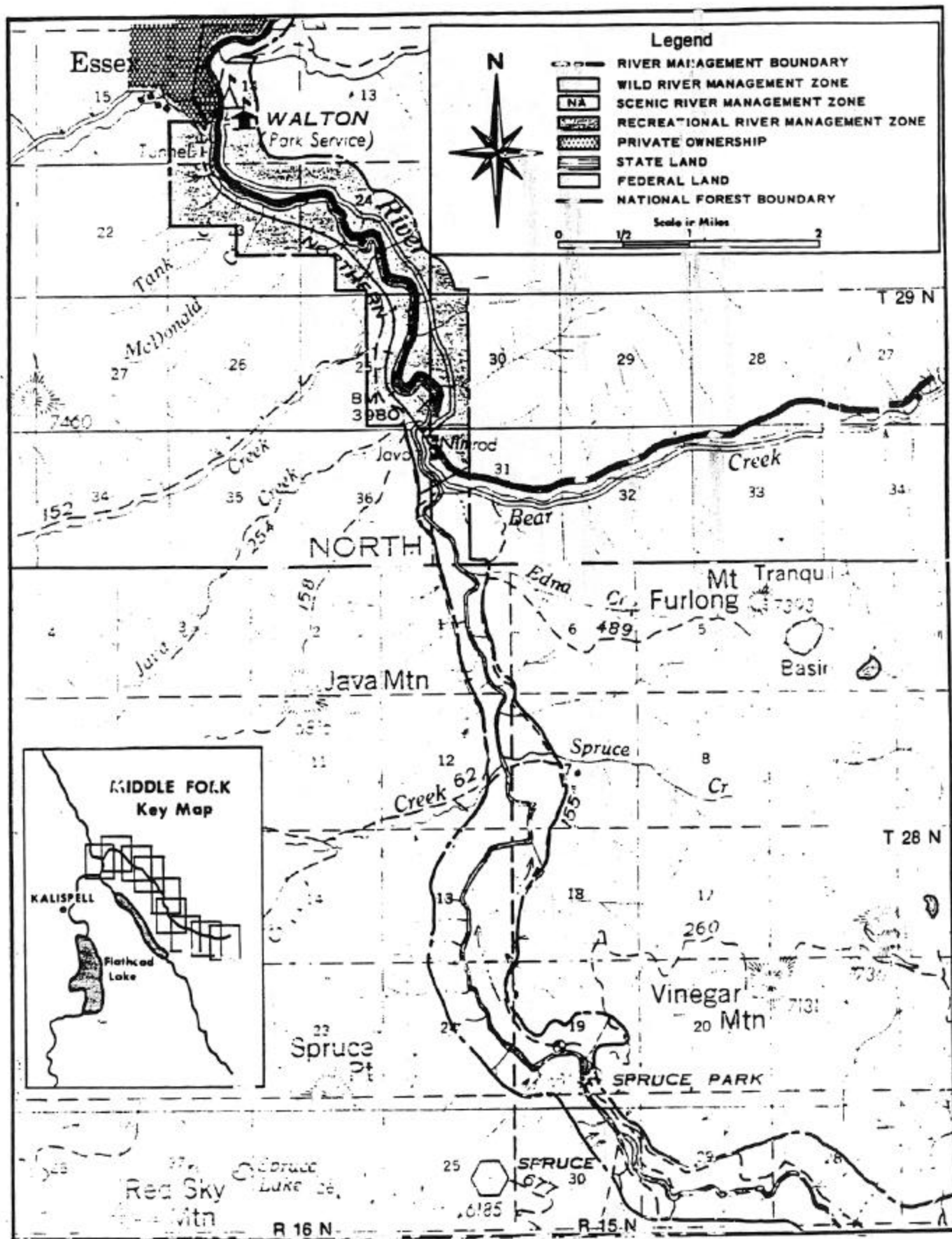
The actions proposed in this project within the Walton Developed areas would not have direct or adverse effects on the resource values for which the river was designated. Glacier National Park prepared an Environmental Assessment stating that the project would have no effect on endangered, threatened, or evaluation status species.

### *Diminishing of Resource Values Above and Below the Project*

There are no other known special or unique features within this section of the Middle Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River Corridor that would be adversely effected by the proposed actions in the Walton Area Plan.

### *Conclusion*

The actions proposed within the Environmental Assessment and Assessment of Effect for the Walton Area Plan would not lessen the values and qualities inherent with this segment of the Wild and Scenic River.



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